



Nights on the Street and Victimization among Homeless Youth

Dan R. Hoyt, Patrick Habecker, Les B. Whitbeck
University of Nebraska-Lincoln



Abstract

Using data from the Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents this research examines the relationship between baseline predictors (victimization, drug use, conduct disorder, sexual identity, and gender) and spending time on the street in a three month period. We then extend this to see if spending at least one night on the street in a three month period predicts reports of victimization at the next wave. The dataset includes thirteen waves of data collection every three months, allowing an extensive study of how cyclical this proposed relationship is, and how detrimental spending nights on the street may be for homeless youth. Preliminary findings reveal that being female reduces the odds of spending at least one night on the street by 49%. Controlling for baseline risk factors, spending even one night on the street in the prior three months significantly increases the risk of being victimized. This indicates that removing the need to spend even one night on the street for homeless adolescents is a critically protective action for risk of victimization.

Purpose

Previous research has focused on the cumulative increases in victimization risk as homeless youth spend longer periods of time on the street. In contrast, we examine increases in risk associated with minimal amounts of exposure to the street.

Shifting our focus to minimal amounts of time spent on the street highlights the detrimental effects of exposure that can occur very early on. Our goal is not to refute prior research on cumulative risk among homeless populations. Instead we wish to emphasize just how quickly the process can start, often with very little time spent on the street. This research suggests that interventions should be focused on preventing any exposure to the street when possible.

Data

This study uses data from the Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents. The dataset includes thirteen waves of data which were spaced three months apart.

At each interview respondents were asked to account for the amount of time they had spent since the previous interview (approx. 3 months) on the street, in shelters, group homes, foster homes, juvenile detention, and several other locations. Because not all of the respondents were interviewed exactly three months apart, proportions of time spent in different locations were created to compare across individuals. We then used these proportions to create a dichotomous measure of spending at least one night on the street (the minimum reportable unit).

Only the first three waves of data are presented here due to attrition issues in later waves.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|--|-----|-------|-----------|-------|------|
| Baseline | | | | | |
| Age | 316 | 17.49 | 1.07 | 16 | 20 |
| Female | 316 | 0.55 | 0.50 | 0 | 1 |
| Heterosexual | 316 | 0.85 | 0.36 | 0 | 1 |
| Major depressive, ever | 316 | 0.31 | 0.46 | 0 | 1 |
| Conduct disorder, lifetime | 316 | 0.77 | 0.42 | 0 | 1 |
| Substance abuse, ever | 316 | 0.60 | 0.49 | 0 | 1 |
| Caregiver abuse | 316 | -0.01 | 0.31 | -1.18 | 1.24 |
| Victimization, Wave 2 | | | | | |
| Victimization (scale) | 226 | 0.60 | 1.04 | 0 | 6 |
| Beaten up | 226 | 0.10 | 0.30 | 0 | 1 |
| Robbed | 226 | 0.14 | 0.34 | 0 | 1 |
| Asked to do a sexual act didn't want to do | 226 | 0.10 | 0.30 | 0 | 1 |
| Sexually assaulted/raped | 226 | 0.04 | 0.21 | 0 | 1 |
| Threatened with a weapon | 226 | 0.19 | 0.39 | 0 | 1 |
| Assaulted and wounded with a weapon | 226 | 0.03 | 0.16 | 0 | 1 |
| Victimization, Wave 3 | | | | | |
| Victimization (scale) | 226 | 0.64 | 1.02 | 0 | 5 |
| Beaten up | 226 | 0.12 | 0.32 | 0 | 1 |
| Robbed | 226 | 0.14 | 0.35 | 0 | 1 |
| Asked to do a sexual act didn't want to do | 226 | 0.16 | 0.37 | 0 | 1 |
| Sexually assaulted/raped | 226 | 0.04 | 0.21 | 0 | 1 |
| Threatened with a weapon | 226 | 0.13 | 0.34 | 0 | 1 |
| Assaulted and wounded with a weapon | 226 | 0.04 | 0.21 | 0 | 1 |



36% spent at least one night on the street at Wave 1

Victimization Wave 2



42% spent at least one night on the street at Wave 2

Victimization Wave 3

Findings

Table 2: Impact of at Least One Night on the Street Upon Victimization Scale at Wave 2, Odds Ratios

| | Victimization Scale | Victimization Scale Elements | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|--------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| | | Beaten Up | Robbed | Asked to do a Sexual Act | Sexually Assaulted | Threatened, Weapon | Assaulted & Wounded |
| Age | 1.165 | 1.496 | 1.122 | 1.143 | 1.320 | 1.128 | 0.608 |
| Gender (<i>Female = 1</i>) | 0.791 | 1.230 | 0.533 | 3.228 * | 4.735 | 0.198 *** | 0.229 |
| Heterosexual (<i>Straight = 1</i>) | 1.011 | 0.701 | 0.916 | 2.558 | 0.990 | 0.790 | -- |
| Major Depressive Ever | 0.918 | 0.692 | 1.881 | 0.644 | 0.919 | 1.709 | 0.819 |
| Conduct Disorder Lifetime | 2.412 * | 1.664 | 2.226 | 9.936 * | 1.203 | 0.914 | -- |
| Substance Abuse Ever | 1.156 | 1.826 | 0.884 | 0.894 | 1.647 | 1.889 | 1.555 |
| Caregiver Abuse (<i>scale</i>) | 0.392 | 0.743 | 0.824 | 0.528 | 0.584 | 0.498 | 0.488 |
| Night on the Street, Wave 1 | 1.900 * | 2.987 * | 1.423 | 1.886 | 1.419 | 2.254 * | 6.532 |
| <i>N</i> | 226 | 226 | 226 | 226 | 226 | 226 | 146 |

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 3: Impact of at Least One Night on the Street Upon Victimization Scale at Wave 3, Odds Ratios

| | Victimization Scale | Victimization Scale Elements | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|--------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| | | Beaten Up | Robbed | Asked to do a Sexual Act | Sexually Assaulted | Threatened, Weapon | Assaulted & Wounded |
| Age | 1.320 * | 1.432 | 1.359 | 1.361 | 1.117 | 1.055 | 1.041 |
| Gender (<i>Female = 1</i>) | 0.905 | 1.107 | 0.519 | 1.552 | 2.576 | 0.292 ** | 0.148 * |
| Heterosexual (<i>Straight = 1</i>) | 0.800 | 1.512 | 1.551 | 0.487 | 1.840 | 0.727 | 0.843 |
| Major Depressive Ever | 0.992 | 1.953 | 1.482 | 0.496 | -- | 1.197 | 4.958 * |
| Conduct Disorder Lifetime | 1.567 | 2.156 | 1.388 | 1.600 | 1.109 | 0.677 | 2.069 |
| Substance Abuse Ever | 1.133 | 1.173 | 1.041 | 0.833 | 0.496 | 3.025 * | 1.501 |
| Caregiver Abuse (<i>scale</i>) | 0.841 | 1.412 | 0.865 | 0.630 | 0.750 | 0.837 | 8.995 |
| Night on the Street, Wave 2 | 1.878 * | 5.095 *** | 1.436 | 1.126 | 2.236 | 3.180 ** | 2.568 |
| <i>N</i> | 226 | 226 | 226 | 226 | 150 | 226 | 226 |

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Summary

Removing the need to spend even one night on the street for homeless adolescents is a critically protective action for risk of victimization.

- 36% of the homeless youth spent at least one night on the street during Wave 1 and 42% during Wave 2 (each wave is a three month period).
- Spending at least one night on the street during Wave 1 increased the odds of being victimized by 1.9 times during Wave 2, and 1.88 times from Wave 2 to Wave 3.
- This effect is driven by exposure to two specific types of victimization, being beaten up and threatened with a weapon.
- The odds of being beaten up increased by 198% at Wave 2 and 410% at Wave 3 if the respondent spent at least one night on the street during the previous three months.
- The odds of being threatened with a weapon increased by 125% at Wave 2 and 218% at Wave 3 if the respondent spent at least one night on the street during the previous three months.